

22 March 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Coupar Angus Primary School and Nursery Class
Perth and Kinross Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including partnership working and the place of the school in the local community. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children enjoy satisfactory experiences in a range of settings across the school. In the nursery class and Strong Starts, in the Thinking Rooms and the Garden Room and the primary stages. In the nursery most children are happy and settled and display confidence in the setting. Positive relationships with most staff members support children to feel safe and secure and most children demonstrate a readiness to learn. The majority of children show commitment to staying on task and a few persevere, with a little support, to complete tasks such as more challenging puzzles. Achievements in and out of nursery are recognised through the WOW wall. Parents are also invited to share children's achievements through Caterpillar Books. We have asked the nursery staff to use observations of learning to ensure the activities reflect children's interests. All children aged three to seven regularly experience high-quality learning in the local woodland. They are developing and applying a range of skills including collaboration, an awareness of safety and listening skills. In the Thinking Rooms and Garden Room children are motivated and engaged in learning. Relationships between staff and children are very positive. Teachers use the rooms well to provide stimulating learning environments which are calm and purposeful. Children in the Garden Room are experiencing learning in a variety of settings including their work in the community poly-tunnel. They enjoy inviting their classmates to share their learning experiences, for example when working in the garden or having breakfast. Children across the school are achieving success through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) New Horizons award. Children in the Garden Room, in addition to this, achieve success in the John Muir Conserver Award. These awards demonstrate the development of their personal and social skills. Across the primary stages almost all children are well behaved and eager to learn. In most lessons, children are interested in what they are learning. They work well in groups, pairs and individually, and help each other to complete activities when

they are given the opportunity. Children are more motivated when involved in making decisions about how and what they learn. For example, children in P7 were able to assess each other's performance in gymnastics and suggest ways in which performance could be improved. Children develop their confidence by leading class assemblies and performing at cultural celebrations and events such as Burns Day or at the school Nativity play. The school provides a range of opportunities for children to extend their learning experiences in and out of school. These include, for example, the Electricity Challenge for children in P4, the visit of children in P2 to Rosemount Farm, and the visit of children in P6 and P7 to the Edinburgh Book Festival. We have asked staff to develop a range of relevant experiences which motivate all children and enable them to make connections in their learning. These should be more clearly focused on which skills are being developed and how well they are developing. Across the school the majority of children attend a wide range of out of school clubs offered by school staff and the Coupar Angus Cycle Hub, Pride of Place and Coupar Angus Food Focus.

Across the school the majority of children are making progress in literacy and numeracy. However, although some children meet national expectations, there is limited evidence on the progress of individuals and groups over time. We have asked the school to take steps to ensure that the attainment of all children is improved. Staff do not yet have a clear picture of children's attainment across the curriculum. They are aware of this and are currently reviewing how learning is planned across the curriculum. In the early years children could be making more positive attempts at mark making and early writing through drawing or play. We have asked the nursery to review how children are introduced to rhyming words and simple phonics in order to improve early progress in language. We have asked the nursery staff to increase their use of assessment information to record children's progress in learning in more detail. Across the primary stages a good standard of reading is evident in most classes. The majority of children can read aloud confidently with appropriate expression. There is scope to raise the level of challenge in reading to ensure children develop advanced literacy skills. Writing skills are developed regularly across all stages but presentation of work across the school is variable. We have asked staff to agree acceptable levels of presentation and encourage children to take more pride in their work. Staff should also ensure that there is a clear progression of skills being taught across the school in listening and talking.

The school has begun to address the need to raise expectations about what children can achieve in mathematics. While the majority of children are making progress in numeracy, there is significant scope to raise expectations about what children can achieve in numeracy and maths. We have asked the school to develop a clear progression of skills and a clear understanding of assessing children's progress in learning in this area. The school needs to ensure that it gathers robust data around learners; progress in numeracy. Children require to develop more robust mental agility in numeracy across the school. Teachers should develop the range of data handling experiences for children and provide more real-life contexts for the application of mathematical skills. Teachers are aware of this and are putting in place clear and agreed approaches to improve learning and to assess children's progress in numeracy and mathematics. We have asked that this work also be developed in the nursery.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Across all the learning settings in the school staff provide caring and nurturing learning environments. Children's additional support needs are identified effectively across the school. The school maintains an overview of the needs of children who require additional support. This supports the staff's knowledge of what children's needs are and what support they are currently receiving. However in the nursery, activities and resources are not always well matched to the needs of children. In the Thinking and Garden Rooms teachers plan tasks and activities well to meet the needs of children. Children in the Thinking Rooms are developing their confidence when learning alongside their peers in mainstream classes and can, for example, express their voice through choice in lessons and through representation on the Pupil Council. In almost all classes across the primary stages teachers plan appropriate learning. In best practice, lessons are differentiated to meet the needs of individual children. However tasks and activities too often lack challenge and do not always meet the needs of children. We have asked staff to ensure that they plan learning experiences that more effectively meet the needs of all children. In particular teachers should raise their expectations of children's abilities and design tasks and activities with more pace and challenge. We have also asked that teachers make more effective use of digital technologies in learning.

The school is currently reviewing aspects of the curriculum in order to ensure that children experience appropriate breadth in their learning across all curriculum areas. We have asked the school to develop a curriculum rationale and use this to review the curriculum as a whole. Foundations for this have been laid through effective work with partners and the recent development of school aims with parents and children. The up-cycling project, for example, is providing stimulating and relevant learning experiences for children. However, at present the school is at the early stages of developing more effective ways to engage partners to provide more coherent learning for children. Staff are aware of the need to develop a clear framework for interdisciplinary learning and for more robust assessment of progress in learning across all curriculum areas. This will ensure that children receive a balance in topics which will help them to make links in their learning

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The new headteacher has made a positive impact in a very short time in the school. She and depute head have the capacity to form an effective team. They have a clear idea of how they would like to improve the work of the school. They now need to share this view and agree priorities with all stakeholders. Teachers demonstrate commitment to developing more effective self-evaluation, for example, through professional learning and taking leadership roles in the school. In the nursery staff reflect on their practice and are keen to develop the setting. The views of parents and carers are gathered both informally and through recently established 'nursery natter' sessions. In the Thinking and Garden Rooms staff reflect effectively on their practice. They note how well children respond to lessons and adapt their practice to improve children's learning. Across the school we have asked that staff further extend the new tracking system to monitor children's progress in learning more effectively across the whole curriculum. At present staff do not have a clear picture of children's attainment.

We have asked the school to ensure they develop more rigorous and robust ways to evaluate children's progress across all areas of the curriculum. Through this staff should develop more robust approaches to self-evaluation which take account of data on children's progress in learning and use this information to ensure improvement.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- High-quality partnership working which is embedded in the work of the school and which supports effective and productive links with the local community.
- Very effective practice in forest schools education in the early years.
- The work of all staff in providing a high level of pastoral care and nurturing ethos across the school.

We discussed with staff and Perth and Kinross Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Develop and agree a curriculum rationale and review the curriculum, including inter-disciplinary learning.
- Improve the use of tracking and monitoring by all staff to better inform self-evaluation and increase rates of progress in children's learning.
- Increase pace and challenge across learning to maximise progress for all children with learning experiences that are motivating, sustain interest and ensure active participation in the learning process.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. Our Area Lead Officer will work with Perth and Kinross Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out a further inspection within 12 months of publication of this letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the school has improved.

David Drysdale
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/CouparAngusPrimarySchoolPerthandKinross.asp>

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